CHAPTER TWO

English as a Lingua Franca in Intercultural Communication[1]

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2.1. Introduction

In her book on the relationship between language and culture (Risager 2006), the Danish author distances herself from the theoretical position which totally identifies language with culture. She is a proponent of another approach, which distinguishes between culture and language. It refers to particular languages, including such concepts as "first language / first language culture" and "second/foreign language" / "second/foreign language culture." Risager states that she focuses on the relationship of culture to language, rather than language to culture. It means that "linguistic and cultural practices change and spread through social networks [...] principally on the basis of transnational patterns of migration and markets" (Risager 2006: 2). My approach to culture and language is similar. I believe that it is possible on the grounds of particular languages to partly dissociate language and the culture traditionally associated with that language. Such an approach seems suitable for my purpose of elucidating the role of the English language in intercultural communication, particularly the role of English in preparing students in the second/foreign language classroom for intercultural communication.

Let me start from the difficulties involved in defining the concepts "first language culture," "second language culture" and "foreign language culture." In traditional terms, "first language culture" is the culture associated with one's first language (native language / mother tongue), second language culture is the culture associated with one's second language in the countries where more than one language is used, and foreign language culture is the culture associated with a particular foreign language taught in a given country, also called the target language culture. The traditional approach to teaching foreign language culture associates teaching culture with teaching the target language.

However, on the one hand, social changes, including a great mobility of people, migrations and global economy, and on the other hand, the spread of the English language as a modern lingua franca (ELF), that is, a language for international/ /intercultural communication, have undermined the above concepts. The questions arise: what is "first language culture," "second language culture" and "foreign language culture"? For instance, in the case of immigrants, "first language culture" means the so-called "heritage-language culture," the maintenance of which can be

[1] Parts of this chapter have been included in Niżegorodcew (forthcoming).

endangered in a second language country. In the case of bicultural and bilingual speakers, "second language culture" has lost its original sense. In the case of those English language learners who do not wish to study British or American varieties, "foreign language culture" may mean the culture of other varieties of English, such as Indian English or Australian English.

In the present Chapter, I discuss issues that address "English as a lingua franca in intercultural communication": Section 2.2 is an outline of sociocultural theory of second language learning. Section 2.3 focuses on the dissociation of English as a language of international communication from the target language culture. Section 2.4 outlines the role of ELF in intercultural communication. Finally, Section 2.5 introduces a discussion from the perspective of speakers of other languages, on the role of ELF in making their own culture/s familiar to other ELF speakers.

2.2. Sociocultural Theory of Second Language Learning

At the International Congress of Applied Linguistics in 1996, Alan Firth and Johannes Wagner delivered a critical paper, in which they criticized mainstream second language acquisition theory for being purely cognitive, that is psycholinguistic, without taking the sociocultural context of second language use into account (Firth and Wagner 1997). They claimed that second language learning/acquisition is closely combined with second language use, and the latter is undoubtedly affected by the sociocultural context in which it occurs.

Among the respondents to Firth and Wagner, some agreed with the authors in their critical views, such as Hall (1997) and Liddicoat (1997), and opted for a sociocultural approach to second language acquisition studies, while others, Kasper (1997), Poulisse (1997) and Long (1997) supported Susan Gass, who claimed that "there are apples and oranges, and apples do not need to be orange" (Gass 1998: 83), that is, internal psycholinguistic processes of second language acquisition should be distinguished from their sociocultural context and second language acquisition research is concerned in the first place with the psycholinguistic processes.

In the following year Firth and Wagner (1998) responded to their opponents with more categorical claims. They argued that cognition itself is developed through social activity, and furthermore, that second language use forms cognition. The 1997/98 debate in *The Modern Language Journal* has led to deep changes in the second language acquisition/learning theory. In particular, it has led to a different understanding of second language development. From the psycholinguistic perspective, the second language learning process is primarily a cognitive process, in which other internal and external factors are of secondary importance. The psycholinguistic approach focuses on learning a linguistic system by an individual person. Conversely, the sociocultural approach claims that language is always learned in a particular community, which exerts an impact on internal cognitive processes.

Interestingly, at the beginning of the 90's, the metaphor used by Michael Sharwood-Smith (1991) to refer to the two second language acquisition/learning perspectives compared second language acquisition to a cake and the context of acquisition to its icing, making the cognitive and the sociocultural aspects of second language development much more integrated than did Gass's metaphor of totally different kinds of fruit.

The sociocultural approach considers second language learning as becoming a member of a second language community, which is demonstrated in following its language use norms, including cultural norms. According to Zuengler and Miller (2006), who presented their view on "the state of affairs" in teaching English as a second language for the 40th anniversary of the TESOL Quarterly, sociocultural theory of second language learning draws on four theoretical approaches:

- Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory
- Language Socialization perspective
- Dialogic perspective
- Critical Theory

Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, who wrote his main work *Thought and Language* (in Russian) in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, has exerted an enormous influence upon Western pedagogy since his work has become available in English. Vygotsky claims that language development is accomplished in collaboration with others (parents, teachers, peers) in the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD; cf. Lantolf and Pavlenko 1995). The idea that one can accomplish more when working in collaboration with others than alone finds evidence in many fields and is particularly suitable to support group work.

The language socialization perspective derives its ideas from anthropology and the observation of how children are socialized through language in different cultures (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986). Apart from focusing on first language development in various cultures, researchers have been also concerned with the process of socialization of child and adult immigrant learners in the second language classroom (Atkinson 2002), as well as with the ethnography of communication in the foreign language classroom (Duff 1995).

The Dialogic Perspective encompasses, according to Zuengler and Miller, two conceptions: one of them, "situated learning" and "legitimate peripheral participation," proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991), refer to the types of participation in social practices, including language use in the language classroom (Toohey 2000), and the other, drawing on Bakhtin's metaphor of appropriation of second language utterances to express one's own meaning, is also closely connected with the idea of mutual co-construction of meanings in dialogues (cf. Bakhtin 1981).

Critical Theory elucidates the question of power, marginalization and identity of second language learners (Canagarajah 1999; Norton 2000; Pennycook 2001).

The authors take a critical stance towards nation states which have a powerful instrument of acculturation, which is its mainstream education in the country's first/native language.

Particular national states have their own educational policies concerning immigrants' languages and cultures, some are more tolerant, others more restrictive For example, France takes measures to quickly integrate its multicultural students as French citizens (Debeane 2010), and Britain and Ireland seem to be more tolerant of other cultures, although mainstream education teachers act on the assumption that English is the only possible language of education (Flynn 2010; Niżegorodcew 2010b), and do not provide any mother tongue education for newly arrived immigrant children without English, as in some other countries, e.g. Norway (Grimstad 2010).

Two more approaches could be added to the above list. One is the Acculturation Model, proposed by Schumann in the 70's. (Schumann 1986). Acculturation is understood as decreasing a social and psychological distance between the second language learner and the target language community. The acculturation model has been applied to account for second language learning processes. An interesting research case study on the acculturation process of recent Polish immigrants in the United Kingdom has been carried out by Smagiel (2008). The results support the thesis that second language learning coincides with a learner's identification with the second language community.

Another more recent theoretical approach applied to second language learning viewed from the sociocultural perspective is Complex Systems Theory (Larsen--Freeman and Cameron 2008). According to the authors, "when we consider two people engaged in talk, their 'conversation' emerges from the dynamics of *how* [my emphasis] they talk to each other, while what they say reflects and constructs who they are as social beings" (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008: 163). Larsen-Freeman and Cameron claim that from the Complex Systems perspective, discourse is a self-organizing and co-adaptive process. "[Language] learning is not the taking in of linguistic forms by learners, but the constant adaptation of their linguistic resources in the service of meaning-making in response to the affordances that emerge in the communicative situation, which is, in turn, affected by learners' adaptability" (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008: 135). The Complex Systems perspective seems to account for the fact that co-operation and understanding is frequently reached despite fragmentary conversations, and in the case of non--native participants, erroneous and incomplete. It frequently happens in second language use, where participation patterns emerge unexpectedly as speakers take into account various levels and dimensions of communication.

All in all, sociocultural approaches have broken the psycholinguistic dominance in second language acquisition/learning theory. In the next section I will focus on the dissociation of English as a language of international communication from British or American culture.

2.3. Dissociation of English as a Language of International Communication from the Target Language Culture

Let us consider the above mentioned sources of sociocultural SLA theory: Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory, Language Socialization Model, Dialogic Model and Critical Theory, as well as Acculturation Theory and Complex Systems Theory. All the approaches stress dialogue, conversation, language learning in a sociocultural setting and following cultural norms of the target language community. All these theories, however, view intercultural communication from the target language cultural perspective. There are abundant examples of books on the development of intercultural awareness which take only a first language perspective (e.g. Tomalin and Stempleski 1993; Rogers and Steinfatt 1999). The authors identify their first language culture with their native language, and they view other cultures from that perspective. I do not claim that such an approach is wrong and that it should be abandoned. It is indeed very useful in target language culture studies.

However, as has been stated in chapter I, intercultural communication is a two--way process, aiming at understanding both cultures – one's own and the other/s, and English as a lingua franca can be used by representatives of other cultures as a medium of intercultural communication to make native cultures known to the others and vice versa. For example, ELF can be used by Ukrainians and Poles as a medium of mutual intercultural understanding.

On this account, in the case of teaching English as a second/foreign language nowadays, identifying English only with British or American culture seems to be counterproductive. In order to be able to communicate in English as a language for international communication with representatives of other cultures, on the basis of *mutual* tolerance and peaceful *co-existence*, we need to understand other cultures as much as we do British or American culture. Distancing ourselves while teaching English from identifying the English language only with British or American culture, we do not have to focus only on values and beliefs underlying these cultures.

Such a strong claim can be supported both on theoretical and practical grounds by sociocultural changes occurring in the world and the position of English as a lingua franca. It has already been claimed that the English language has been *relocated* from the role of a language associated with a target language culture/s to that of the language of international communication (Saraceni 2008: 26).

In consequence of such a *relocation*, the question of whose culture we should teach in the English language classroom arises. What cultural contexts should be taken into consideration? We either stay on the safe but not fully authentic grounds of native speaker traditional values and beliefs, generally speaking, on the grounds of British or American culture, in the sense of established traditions and high culture of the nation state/s, or, we can also include in our syllabuses multicultural

English language speakers' varied traditions and beliefs, as well as non-native speakers' traditions and beliefs, and teach *ELF speakers' cultures.*

Consequently, if we choose to follow the latter approach, in such a multi--faceted view of culture, we can also include other national cultures. More specifically, while teaching English as a language of international communication, we can teach aspects of English language *users'* cultures, that is, different national cultures.

This new term has been introduced recently in second language and ELF studies. English used for international communication identifies its speakers as "second language users" and/or "bilingual or multi-/plurilingual speakers" (cf. Cenoz and Jessner 2000; Cook 2002; Block 2003; Gabryś-Barker 2005). They belong to an ELF "community of practice" (see above Young 2009: 146). Although their linguistic proficiency may sometimes be limited, and their cultural background is varied, ELF identification can be obtained since ELF users have common goals (e.g. participation in international projects or conferences), take advantage of different levels of communication (verbal as well as non-verbal) and try to make sense of ELF messages using their multilingual and multicultural knowledge resources. Thus, we find some common ground for speakers of different native languages, who can learn and use English at home and/or abroad in order to communicate with other speakers.

Obviously, replacing the target culture with another culture is not a new phenomenon. In the past, such replacements were done either by naive and careless authors and editors, or for ideological purposes. For instance, in Polish EFL coursebooks published in the 50's, English was used by members of a Polish working class family talking about their life in the socialist town of Nowa Huta.

Nowadays, however, at least in Europe, there are two underlying motives in dissociating the English language from the target culture in ELT materials. Firstly, the actual mobility of large numbers of people, and secondly, the impact minorities and immigrants have on European societies. Instead of teaching one national English language culture, course designers and textbook writers try to focus on the culture/s of international mobile audiences: business people, Erasmus students, school exchangees, holiday makers, pilgrims, artists etc.

The second motive, particularly in "old" Europe, refers to the concept of the monolithic native speaker, which has been shaken (cf. Cook 2002; Block 2003). Consequently, ELT course designers have serious doubts if a monolingual and monocultural native speaker should be a model for second/foreign language learners. Instead they propose non-native and minority English language speakers, who promote their own cultures while using English.

In the following section I will focus on the role of English as a lingua franca in the contemporary world.

2.4. Role of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

History knows other languages that once became international languages and retained their status for a longer or shorter time. Latin is the best example of a European lingua franca, used by the educated Europeans since the Middle Ages up to the 17th century. Later, French became extremely popular among upper and middle classes in Europe. In the former Soviet Union, Russian was used as a lingua franca. Reasons why a particular language becomes a lingua franca are not purely linguistic. They are also political and ideological. Past lingae francae propagated particular values, beliefs and life styles: Latin spread Christianity, French – rationalism and the ideas of Enlightenment, Russian – communism.

The process of borrowing English words by non-native speakers is the most visible effect of the English language expansion. In the present globalized world, borrowing English words by other languages is facilitated due to the powerful influences exerted on other cultures by the globalized market economy, the Internet, as well as the media and popular culture. Due to these influences, English words are omnipresent in other nations' daily lives, which is frequently resented in some countries and cultures as "English linguistic imperialism" (Phillipson 1992). In other countries, however, the process of English language influence is generally accepted and welcome. Reasons why some nations resent English and others welcome it has to do with negative attitudes based on the past history or present political and cultural rivalry (e.g. in France), or alternatively, with positive attitudes based on the English language being a counterbalance for the past negative experiences with other languages and cultures (e.g. in Central and Eastern Europe – English as a counterbalance for the Russian and German languages). Having in mind the above considerations, we should remember, as Guilherme (2002) and Byram (2008) observe, that "second language education *is* a political action."

Critical as we can be against global economy and mass culture, we should, however, admit that without knowing a common language it is extremely difficult to carry out international business negotiations, scientific research, as well as to communicate in everyday life. The idea of teaching English for intercultural communication has become popular in the English teaching world in spite of the perceived dangers (Canagarajah 1999). In House's view (2003), ELF as the main European language for communication is not a threat to multilingual Europe, where national languages are used in a different role – as languages for national identification.

The question arises whether we can understand particular target cultures through a lingua franca. Generally speaking, there are two views on using a lingua franca in understanding culture. One view stresses the impoverishment of culture (even destruction of culture) by a lingua franca: using a lingua franca means a careless and limited language use for impoverished intercultural communication

("an Esperanto,"[2] contemptuously commented a speaker during a public debate on the use of a common language in intercultural communication). Lingua franca is understood as a global language which destroys particular languages, in the way similar to global culture destroying local cultures. In this impoverished sense, a lingua franca means a degradation of symbols, degradation of culture itself; creating a "supermarket of culture" where everything is cheap and for sale. Obviously, it is not the view that I would like to promote in understanding another culture.

The other view emphasizes the enrichment of culture by a lingua franca by encompassing diverse cultures and making them available to one another. The enrichment refers to the new meanings being assimilated into English by its non--native users. Intercultural communication is facilitated through a lingua franca, which is a language full of new associations, reflecting a multi-faceted reality, implied meanings and symbols. At the same time a lingua franca should be in a sense "a non-threatening medium of self-expression" (Sifakis 2009: 233). Obviously, its subjective reception depends on one's experience, that is why it is better if it is a more "detached" language, the use of which does not carry negative connotations.

In the latter sense, ELF refers to non-native uses of standard English, allowing for certain deviations from the native norms, such as foreign accent, using more formal registers than native speakers usually do, using certain national idiosyncrasies and code-switching, rather than committing errors. Consequently, ELF as a variety of English should not be considered as a simplified and/or distorted variety. On the contrary, on the advanced level, it can be treated as its enriched variety (cf. Grzega 2005).

In the next and final section, I will discuss the role of ELF in making one's own culture familiar to other ELF speakers. In particular, I will focus on the development of ELF users' intercultural awareness.

2.5. Using English as a Lingua Franca to Familiarize Speakers of Other Languages with One's Own Culture

If people know only one (native) language, they tend to treat their culture as inherently connected with that language and they develop a strong sense of identity with one "languaculture" (cf. Agar 1994; Risager 2006). In consequence, it is difficult for them to distance themselves from identifying language with culture. Multilingual users[3] are more flexible in their overall treatment of other languages and cultures, since they have their own experience of having learned one, two

[2] Esperanto is an artificial language created in 1887 by a Jewish-Polish physician Dr. Ludwik Zamenhof.

[3] In my understanding of the term "multilingual users," also bilingual speakers and lingua franca speakers are included in it.

or three languages, other than their native tongue, and through those languages, they have acquired some access to other cultures and multicultural aspects of language use.

Multilingual speakers frequently transfer words and phrases from one language to another. The phenomenon of transferring elements of one language to another is referred to as *code-switching*, and it heavily depends on the context of language use. In intercultural communication with speakers of a given language, code-switching to that language identifies the speaker as somebody who tries to "belong" to some extent to the target language group. Using a given language indicates that the speakers express their links with a particular language group and their culture. Even using a single word may identify the speaker as belonging to a particular ethnic, regional, generational, or professional group (cf. Niżegorodcew 2010a).

Intercultural competence development involves raising intercultural awareness, that is, making learners realize how their language use, in particular, using given words and pragmalinguistic patterns in their native tongue and in other languages, identifies them as members of various social groups. An intercultural competent speaker/writer is able to consciously adapt their cultural norms embedded in language to the interlocutors/addressees.

ELF users can identify with a very large group of people who communicate in English as a language for international communication. In Singleton and Aronin's view, "English has [...] permeated the sense of identity of a large number of non-native speakers to the extent that it is now 'owned' by them." (Singleton and Aronin 2007: 13) The authors claim that this new identity of non-native users refers to their behaviour towards the English language, decisions they take to use it or not, and in what circumstances.

Apart from focusing on the cultures of English speaking countries, ELF users can also choose to familiarize speakers of other languages with their own cultures. They take the role of "intercultural mediators." They use their knowledge of their own and target cultures, their skills to discover and interpret cultural messages through ELF, as well as attitudes of openness and attentiveness towards other cultures (cf. Byram 1997). However, if they wish to familiarize speakers of other languages with their culture, they should also distance themselves from that culture and to approach it with a critical attitude. Such an attitude can be developed through teaching materials that involve critical reading and listening tasks (Niżegorodcew and Bandura 2009: 119).

In the above sense, intercultural communication can be compared to translating (cf. Schäffner 2003). Both intercultural communicators and translators are intercultural mediators. According to Schäffner, "communicators act in their own role," whereas "translators produce texts that are used by others for communication" (Schäffner 2003: 91). However, while enabling intercultural communication, ELF can also pose problems with understanding cultural nuances and connotations, similar to the problems faced by professional translators (cf. "lost in translation"

phenomenon). It seems that code-switching to the native language and providing native terms may be a good solution in the case of the vocabulary referring to unique aspects of a particular culture. The remaining problems can be solved by adding glosses to the texts.

Let us try to answer one final question – what is the difference between using ELF to familiarize speakers of other languages with one's own culture and teaching English combined with teaching one's own culture? Ideally, there should not be any difference. However, teaching language is basically different from using language. In teaching language, teachers try to facilitate the process of language learning by focusing on separate macro- and microskills. Even recently published English language coursebooks treat culture only as one of the components of language, putting relatively more stress on the development of language skills. The only teaching approach that focuses on the language content rather than on the form is CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). The approach can use national cultures, including own culture, as its content combined with teaching English. This is an interesting and promising approach to language teaching. The readers of this Chapter are advised to learn more about CLIL in the relevant sources (e.g. Marsh and Wolff 2007; Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols 2008).

2.6. Conclusion

This Chapter has focused on the linguistic side of intercultural communication. Since English has become a modern lingua franca (ELF), that is, a language for international communication, the discussion has been concerned with the English language in the process of dissociation or relocation from its first language culture (British and/or American), and encompassing different cultures, through its use by multicultural non-native ELF speakers.

Although ELF speakers are members of different national and ethnic groups, according to sociocultural second language learning theory, they can be also identified as belonging to common "communities of practice," because they use a common language for communication.

In my understanding of the term, ELF in intercultural communication refers to the function of communication, and not to specific forms used by non-native speakers. I claim that ELF can indeed be an enriched variety of English, due to new meanings associated with multicultural contexts being assimilated into English by its non-native users.

The final section of this Chapter has touched upon the issue of using ELF to familiarize speakers of other languages with one's own culture. It has been claimed that intercultural communicators in the role of intercultural mediators should be particularly aware who they identify with and who they address. Such intercultural awareness is impossible to attain without a critical attitude towards one's own culture.

QUESTIONS AND TASKS

1. What are the difficulties involved in defining the concepts: "first-language culture," "second-language culture" and "foreign-language culture"?
2. What is the fundamental difference between psycholinguistic and sociocultural second language learning approaches?
3. What theoretical models do sociocultural approaches to second language learning draw on?
4. What is a "community of practice"? Provide some examples of "communities of practice."
5. Why have the two types of approaches been compared to "apples and oranges"?
6. Do you agree with the statement that "second language education is a political action"? Provide some examples from your country/region supporting this statement.
7. Talk to people who are proficient in more than one language (bilingual or multilingual people) and pay attention how they code-switch between the languages. Can you account for the code-switching?
8. What was the role of Latin in the Middle Ages, of French in the 18th and 19th centuries, and of Russian in the Soviet Union? To what extent do these languages retain their former status?
9. What is the role of English in the contemporary world? What is ELF? Is English language teaching a modern form of imperialism?
10. Who are "second language users," according to Vivian Cook (2002)?
11. What problems can be faced while using a lingua franca to familiarize speakers of other languages with one's own culture?
12. Try to translate a poem written in your national language into English. What problems are you likely to encounter?
13. Whose culture should we teach if we teach a language spoken by multicultural communities?
14. What is the difference between using ELF to familiarize speakers of other languages with one's own culture and teaching English combined with teaching one's own culture?
15. Find a text in English that describes another culture (including your national/regional culture). Can you identify the attitude of the author/s? Are they critical towards some aspects of the described culture or are they uncritically approving of all its aspects? What is the function of the text?

16. Select a few coursebooks of English language teaching, both those published in English speaking countries and in your country, recently and in the past. Find sections devoted to culture teaching. What differences do you notice between the new and the older approaches to teaching culture? What are the differences between teaching culture in coursebooks published in English speaking countries and in your country?

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